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United States Coast Guard

Marine Safety Office St. Louis

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Low Water, Ice Conditions Prompt Coast Guard to Issue Upper Mississippi, Illinois River Safety Advisories

ST. LOUIS – The Coast Guard Captain of the Port (COTP) St. Louis, issued a safety advisory Thursday, for the Illinois River due to ice conditions that have developed during the recent cold snap. The advisory affects vessels transiting the river between mile markers 171 and 179 near Peoria, Ill., and requests that mariners avoid meeting or passing situations in the area. The advisory also requests that the size of tows proceeding through the New La Grange and Peoria Locks be limited to 105-feet wide. The advisory was issued after consultation with the Illinois River Carriers Association (IRCA) and review of the results of a Coast Guard overflight conducted by an HH-65A helicopter from Coast Guard Air Station Detroit. The helicopter crew will be conducting overflights today as well, to further assess ice conditions and the effects of the low water event.

A separate advisory was issued Thursday for the Upper Mississippi River that advises mariners pushing barges drafting more than nine feet to continue through the system if between Cairo, Ill., and the Port of St. Louis. This move is intended to take advantage of a slight rise in the river and get barges drafting more than nine feet out of the system before levels fall again. The advisory also strongly encourages mariners to obtain fleeting arrangements prior to entering the Port of St. Louis. The management of fleeting areas becomes critical as the river falls and the number of barges in the fleeting areas increases.

Other advisories currently in effect cover 185 miles of the Upper Mississippi River from Cairo, Ill., to St. Louis. Those advisories request that:

- Vessel traffic between mile markers 71 and 72 on the Upper Mississippi River, near Grand Tower, Ill., be restricted to daylight operations only and that mariners use extreme caution while operating in the area.
- All southbound tows use an assist tug between mile markers 71 and 72.
- No single-skin, tank-barges be moved if they draft more than eight foot, six inches, regardless of when they entered the system.
- Barge operators not load any barges to more than eight foot, six inches.

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ADVISORY

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- Mariners avoid meeting situations between mile markers 125 and 127, near Ste. Genevieve, Mo., due to narrow channel conditions in that area.
- Northbound tows be limited to a total of 24 barges, configured six long by four wide, with no more than 15 loaded barges.
- Southbound tows be limited to a total of 20 barges, configured five long by four wide.

A safety advisory is the least restrictive tool the COTP can use in waterways management. It allows the maritime industry to police itself, which is most effective in conditions such as this extreme low water event, where a failure to follow the advisory could result in a shutdown of the entire river system to all users due to the grounding or the sinking of a vessel within the channel.

The Coast Guard will monitor vessel traffic to verify compliance with the provisions of the advisory. Should the COTP feel the advisory is not being adhered to, the COTP could establish a safety zone that makes compliance with the provisions of the safety zone a condition of passage. Failure to adhere to the requirements of a safety zone can result in a fine.

Even with the ability to continue moving vessel traffic on the river, some maritime industry representatives have estimated that the necessary restrictions on barge drafts and tow sizes are costing the industry \$1-2 million a day in lost revenue and additional expenses.

The advisories will remain in effect until conditions warrant change. The river stage, as read at the St. Louis gauge, was -3.1 feet this morning.

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